

# COMMANDER'S HATCH

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## Digital Warrior

Force XXI digital systems are redefining the way we will fight on the battlefields of the future. Mounted warfighters must familiarize themselves with the new technological advances that are driving our Army into the 21st Century. This requirement is complicated by the necessity to conduct the day-to-day business of running platoons, companies, battalions, and brigades with non-digital systems.

We have come a long way in understanding the implications of digital operations and it is clear now that information age technology will profoundly change the way we fight in the next century. The challenge is to deal with the technological advances while addressing the daily problems of training, maintaining, and sustaining our tactical units.

The need to keep our units prepared and ready during this process is evident. I know this will be difficult over the next few years as we search for ways to reduce personnel turbulence. In fact, the number of armor and cavalry soldiers will be reduced by about one-third from that available in Operation DESERT STORM by the time we complete downsizing. The number of available company level commands will be reduced as will opportunities to serve as a battalion S3 and XO. However, the demand for branch qualified officers, particularly captains and majors, will remain about the same. Therefore, unless we carefully manage our human resources, young officers

will have less time in tactical units to develop the skills necessary to become quality battalion and brigade commanders.

For the foreseeable future, company command, S3, and battalion executive officer tours will be approximately twelve months in duration. There are many, competing demands on leaders in the Army of today, including an ever increasing requirement for joint and AC/RC duty assignments. If we are to continue building competent warfighters for the future, all of us must find ways to teach our young officers critical warfighting and leadership skills quicker and more efficiently.

This will be a complex undertaking with no precedent to follow. However, there are some general guidelines which may provide insight into this dilemma. We can empower subordinates with relevant information, focus on teaching and mentoring, and redefine roles and relationships. We can take advantage of the information available on the Internet. Unit leaders can call the doctrine writers and the training and concept developers at the Armor School to find ways to assist subordinates in learning about new ideas and procedures.

Also, we cannot underestimate the power of talking to one another professionally and in frank, plain language. The ability to move information around in our organizations remains the single best way to ensure high performance. Clearly, we must establish priorities

and spend our precious time working only on the important tasks. *What we cannot change is the standard of performance in leading, training, maintaining, and caring for our soldiers and their families that we achieved during DESERT STORM.*

All of us will have to work hard to maintain currency on the emerging Force XXI developments while doing other important jobs. But the mounted force has faced periods of change like this before and has not only endured, but flourished. Innovation and teamwork remain core characteristics of the mounted force.

Dealing with the Army of today is not unlike preparing for a rotation at one of our combat training centers. We must focus on the important tasks, move authority to get things done down to the lowest level, and integrate our efforts if we are to be successful. We must do all of this without grinding our leaders and soldiers into the ground. There must be time for reflection, thinking, planning, and coordination if we are to operate at peak efficiency. We must make time for our families and for professional growth. There also has to be a place for fun. And lastly, we must accomplish the mission. All of this is possible, but not without effort. We can and must accommodate change in this period of turmoil and turbulence, and now is the time to start.

ON THE WAY!